

A Voice in State Transportation Planning and Decision-Making

-- Executive Summary --

**Final Draft
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Need – Why Does Missouri Need an Improved Process for Transportation Planning and Decision-Making?

Missouri has more transportation needs than money to address them.

MoDOT has the responsibility to select the most critical transportation projects and focus on the state's highest-priority transportation needs. MoDOT must use effective planning and decision-making to make sure Missouri's limited transportation dollars are spent in the most responsible way.

The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission (MHTC) adopted a more objective method for distributing transportation funds in January 2003, which set in motion the development of a framework for better planning and better investment decisions. The improved planning process is valid regardless of funding-distribution methods.

Goal – Develop a Better Process for Missouri

An improved, more transparent planning process reflecting a shared transportation vision for Missouri is needed to identify the highest-priority transportation needs and projects. ***MoDOT set out to develop a process in which local officials and the general public could understand how decisions are made, could participate in the process and could influence the decisions.***

The new planning framework:

- defines each step of the planning and decision-making process and how they fit together,

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- defines the role of local officials and the public in each step of the planning and decision-making process, and
- includes processes for prioritizing needs and projects to ensure a degree of statewide consistency while allowing regional flexibility.

The planning framework provides the means for a more objective approach to transportation decision-making. However, these decisions are complex and are based on values and environmental factors that change frequently. The planning framework relies on the right people being involved in making decisions and adjusts to the changing factors. It recognizes that planning is as much art as science, or in other words, that both objective and subjective criteria are part of transportation planning decisions.

The improved planning process is flexible, so local officials, with input from their constituents, can determine what's appropriate for their communities. The planning process also has a system of checks and a balance to make sure it's working.

Approach – Merging Public Involvement and Decision-Making

Through public involvement, citizens have a say in how transportation dollars are spent. There are many ways citizens can get involved. The most common is the public meeting. MoDOT holds public meetings throughout the planning and project development processes. These meetings are held in communities around the state specifically to gather input from the general public. MoDOT employees attend to explain what's going on, answer questions and seek comments. Another example is an advisory team. MoDOT sometimes establishes citizens' groups that help guide a project's development.

MoDOT's improved planning process offers other ways for Missourians to have a say. MoDOT will work closely with local officials to meet community needs. Citizens have access locally to planning organizations, city and county officials, and elected officials. By working with these individuals and various groups or by participating in public meetings, Missourians have a say in MoDOT's decision-making process.

The framework is built on MoDOT's public participation philosophy –

The Missouri Department of Transportation will work side-by-side with local officials to make transportation decisions. Missourians will have opportunities to influence decisions before they are made.

The planning framework outlines MoDOT's transportation planning and decision-making process. The framework defines

- the technical aspect (the work planners and engineers need to do) and
- the public involvement aspect (who needs to be involved and at what points in the process).

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MoDOT's public participation philosophy is the foundation for transportation decision-making regardless of mode. However, the prioritization processes have been developed to primarily address roadway and bridge funding categories as set forth in MoDOT's funding-distribution method. They do not address projects from all modes of transportation; however, there is regional flexibility to consider multimodal projects. Funds designated for other modes in Missouri are distributed according to processes defined for those modes or are appropriated for specific projects.

Local officials' involvement is MoDOT's primary focus of the improved planning processes. These officials, who are elected by the general public, join together regionally to form boards of directors of Missouri's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional planning commissions (RPCs). The framework identifies opportunities throughout the planning process for involvement of local officials. This will optimize local official and public influence in transportation decision-making for Missouri.

MPOs represent urbanized areas with populations over 50,000. They are responsible for planning within their regions, including transportation planning. RPCs represent multi-county rural regions and are charged with coordinating functions of local governments, including transportation planning.

The general public is involved in two ways.

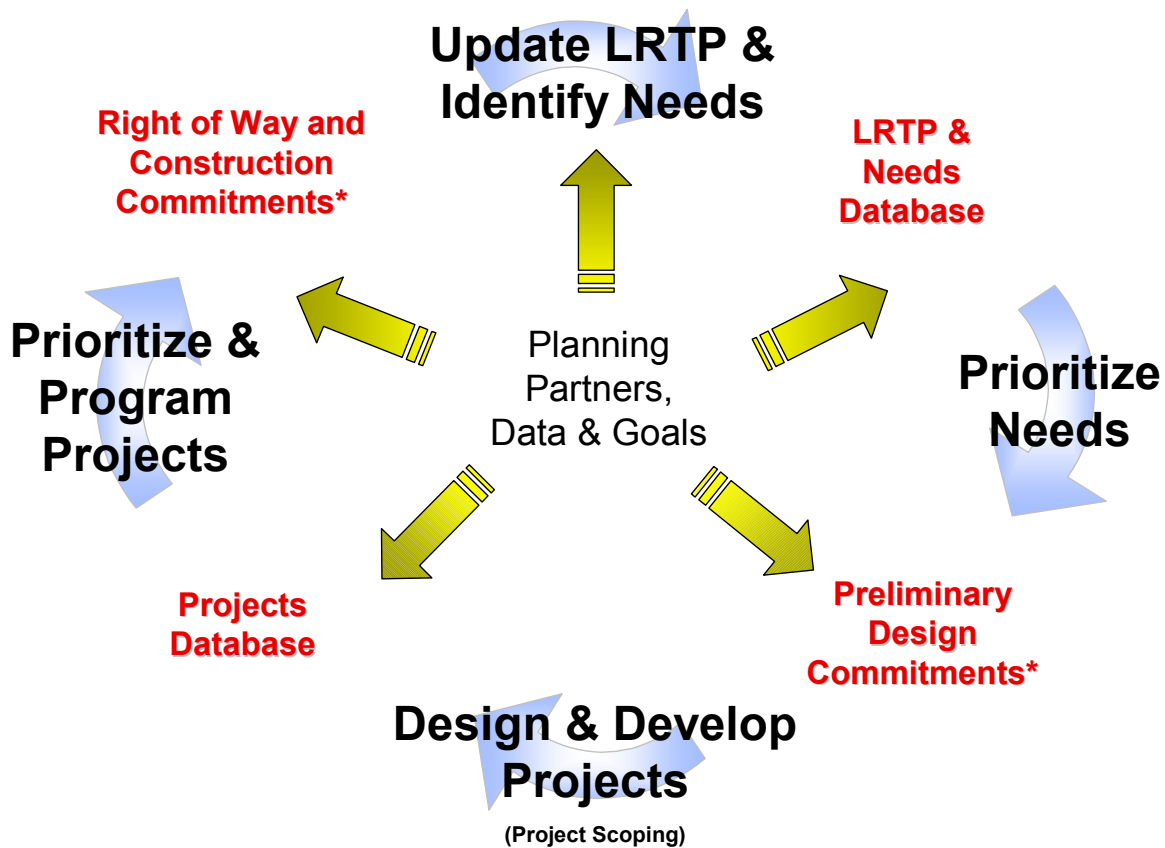
- By electing their local officials who represent them on RPC and MPO boards of directors
- By direct contact with MoDOT, MPOs, RPCs or local officials

Content – Details of the Planning Framework

The Planning Process

The transportation planning process can take up to 20 years for a project to go from needs identification through project development and construction. The planning process, illustrated in the following diagram, is a continuous cycle, and at any given time, there are multiple needs or projects at each step in the process. The four outer arrows represent processes that have been defined as part of the framework. The text between the arrows represents the key products of these processes. All steps require continuous participation from local officials and the public.

Transportation Planning Process



* Listed in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

Each step in the planning and decision-making process includes opportunities for public involvement. All MoDOT districts statewide will follow the same decision-making timetable for developing the construction program and are committed to involving the public in this process.

Long-Range Transportation Plan

MoDOT works with MPOs and RPCs (MoDOT's planning partners), public officials, special interest groups and citizens to set and refine Missouri's transportation vision in the long-range transportation plan (LRTP). The vision is Missouri's ideal transportation system – however, Missouri cannot afford all the components of this ideal system. The LRTP also includes policies and goals and a fiscally constrained strategy for achieving the highest-priority components of the transportation vision within an agreed upon timeframe. This requires working with planning partners to determine where Missouri's transportation dollars should be spent.

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MPO LRTPs include policy development, fiscally constrained needs identification, public involvement and conformity with air quality regulations. The content of these MPO plans is similar to the long-range statewide plan. MPO plans include public outreach and require approval of the MPO board of directors, which is comprised of the region's local officials. In general, items in MPO and state LRTPs are consistent. Resources will be allocated only to the needs and projects agreed upon by both the MPO and MoDOT.

MoDOT will work with RPCs to develop Regional Transportation Plans (RTP) that include long-term goals, needs identification and public outreach. These plans will require approval of the RPC board of directors, which is comprised of local officials, but will not require the same level of analysis as MPO LRTPs. RTPs will be considered in the development of the state LRTP.

LRTP public involvement will concentrate on developing Missouri's shared transportation vision and will use a public involvement plan that works to capture the public's opinion on transportation issues and needs. The plan will target all levels of public involvement including MPOs and RPCs, local officials, legislators, interest groups and the general public. MoDOT will involve Missourians to help determine the public's expectations of the transportation system and the relative priority of each expectation.

Needs Identification

There are varied transportation problems, often called needs, on Missouri's transportation system. Identifying these needs is a continuous process and crucial for successful planning. For example, one need might be redesigning a high-accident location, such as an intersection; another need might be a location improvement that helps a new business move products more efficiently. There are two levels of needs identification – regional and statewide, and they are classified in two groups – physical system condition needs, which target the state of repair of the road and bridge components, and functional needs, which target how well the transportation system is operating.

- Statewide needs are identified formally through the LRTP process, and the public outreach is done in conjunction with the LRTP development. These needs typically cross several county lines and involve interstates and U.S. highways.
- MoDOT districts work with planning partners to identify regional transportation needs. Specific methods and timeframes are discussed in the implementation section of the planning framework.

Needs Prioritization

Needs prioritization is based on the goals in Missouri's LRTP. MoDOT districts will work with planning partners to prioritize regional needs annually. Statewide needs will be prioritized when MoDOT's LRTP is updated; however, emerging needs can be added to the needs priority list between updates. Both regional and statewide needs will be prioritized using the processes established in the framework, which are based primarily on objective data. Using the results of the prioritization process as a starting point, MoDOT districts will work with planning partners to divide needs into three categories.

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- **High** – Resources are focused on addressing these needs first. They are the first to be selected for preliminary engineering.
- **Medium** – These needs may be addressed as additional resources become available.
- **Low** – No work is in progress to address these needs at this time.

The high-priority needs list is fiscally constrained to about 10 years of funding and is not a commitment to design or construct projects. Each time needs are prioritized existing needs will be re-evaluated. Some high-priority needs may never be designed or constructed due to prohibitive costs, changing priorities or other reasons. Needs from the high-priority list will be selected for project scoping.

Design and Develop Projects

Project scoping is the process to analyze transportation needs and select the best overall solutions. It involves –

- 1) determining the root causes of the transportation problems;
- 2) developing a range of possible solutions for the problems;
- 3) reviewing the social, economic, energy and environmental impacts;
- 4) evaluating and choosing the best solutions;
- 5) setting the projects' physical limits;
- 6) accurately estimating the projects' cost; and
- 7) forecasting the projects' delivery schedule.

The scoping process helps determine the most complete, cost-effective solutions early in the project development process.

The public's involvement in defining the needs and determining the appropriate solution will take several forms. The public may actually initiate the investigation of needs by contacting MoDOT or its other planning partners. The public, through its local officials, has representation in the scoping process. As project scoping teams develop public involvement plans for specific projects, the public will have further opportunity to review concepts and provide input. Guidance for planning-partner involvement during project scoping will be developed during the framework's implementation.

After viable solutions have been found for high-priority needs, the needs move on to the project prioritization process.

Project Prioritization

The project prioritization processes are based primarily on data and serve as a starting place for determining the best candidates for funding. There are separate project prioritization processes for each category in MoDOT's funding distribution method.

The project prioritization processes include the following.

- Safety (joint regional/district decision)
- Taking care of the system (joint regional/district decision)
- Regional and emerging needs (joint regional/district decision)
- Major projects – system expansion (regional input for statewide decision)
- Interstates (regional input for statewide decision)

Using the results of the prioritization process as a starting point, MoDOT districts will work with planning partners to divide projects into three categories.

- **High** – These projects are the first to be selected for commitment to right of way purchases and construction.
- **Medium** – These projects may be addressed as additional resources become available.
- **Low** – No work is in progress to address these projects at this time.

The high-priority project list is fiscally constrained to five years of funding and is not a commitment for construction. Each time projects are prioritized, existing projects not yet programmed for construction will be re-evaluated. Some high-priority projects may never be constructed due to prohibitive costs, changing priorities or other reasons. If MoDOT and its planning partners unanimously agree that a project no longer addresses a valid need, it will be removed from the priority-project list, freeing resources for projects important to Missouri.

MoDOT districts will work with local officials and planning partners to review the project prioritization processes each year. Every completely scoped project will be prioritized. Once the framework is fully implemented, there will be a steady flow of projects ready for prioritization each year. Projects from the high-priority list will be selected for programming in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program where it is committed for construction.

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, or STIP, includes committed construction projects MoDOT will award over a five-year period. The STIP is a rolling construction plan – as one year is completed, another year is added. The STIP is fiscally constrained by the projected revenue over its life. MoDOT districts will work with MPOs and RPCs and their boards of directors to determine which high-priority projects should be funded.

The year-long involvement of planning partners – which includes MPOs and RPCs, public officials, special interest groups and citizens – outlined in the framework culminates in a 60-day public-comment period for the draft STIP. The document is publicized and distributed to

locations where Missourians can review it and offer comments. Changes are made in response to comments before a final draft is developed and presented to the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission for approval.

Implementation of the Planning Framework

The planning framework also includes an implementation plan that guides MoDOT's activities in transition from current planning practices to adoption of the framework. This component includes specific tasks and target dates that must be completed in order to implement the improved processes. MoDOT will begin fully using the framework processes with the development of the 2006-2010 STIP. MHTC is committed to finishing projects in the current STIP; therefore, these projects will not be re-evaluated by the framework processes.

Even though the framework's prioritization processes will not be used in the development of the 2005-2009 STIP, the intent to involve local officials in its development will begin immediately. Following the MHTC framework endorsement, districts will begin fully implementing all aspects of the planning and decision-making processes.

Fine-tuning the elements of the framework is an iterative process. The need for making changes will decrease as time goes by and as the processes evolve to better reflect the values and goals of Missouri's diverse regions.

While the methods for each step in the planning process may be newly defined in the framework, the steps are not new. Current needs, projects and commitments were not evaluated by the new methods, however, work on them will continue. It will take several years before the full benefits of the framework are realized and before the new framework processes have evaluated all needs and projects.

Memorandums of Understanding

During the planning framework implementation, each MoDOT district will develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with planning partners in their region. These MOUs must be completed in September 2004 and will be based on MoDOT's public participation philosophy. These MOUs will include the following.

- Schedule for all planning activities

The following deadlines must be met each year in order to complete the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program –

- Revise prioritization processes for needs and projects – due in July
- Develop interstate project priorities – due in August
- Prepare high-priority needs and project lists – due in December
- Select projects for programming – due in February
- Review Draft STIP – due in April

- Details of how MoDOT will work with planning partners at each step of the planning process
 - Who will facilitate each process?
 - What methods will be used?
 - When will activities take place?
 - How will the public be involved?

Quality Assurance and Quality Control

The new planning framework also includes a Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) plan to ensure MoDOT and its planning partners fulfill their roles in the planning process. MoDOT districts' and General Headquarters' staff will be responsible for providing checks and balances to make certain each is using the improved planning-process components as intended, without lengthening the planning timeline.

Each year, MoDOT's General Headquarters will prepare a report summarizing the past year's statewide planning activities. This report will measure MoDOT's use of the framework and its effectiveness. The report will be provided to MPOs and RPCs, whose boards of directors will be asked to review it and provide feedback to MoDOT's chief engineer. It will also be available for public review and comment. MoDOT will work with planning partners to address any concerns.

The QA/QC process will be reviewed and updated annually, at first, and then in conjunction with the statewide LRTP update every three to five years.

As part of the QA/QC process, MoDOT will be revisiting the planning process within two years of implementation and at least once every five years after that. MoDOT will have a review and comment period, of at least 60 days, about the planning process following each review. This complies with federal requirements for rural local officials' consultation.

Outcomes – Better Decisions, Better Transportation System

The framework allows MoDOT to accomplish the following outcomes.

- **Increased influence and involvement of local communities in decision-making**
The framework requires extensive involvement of regional planning partners at each step of the planning and decision-making process.
- **Increased predictability in the planning and decision-making process**
The framework establishes a process outlining how and when transportation investment decisions are made and when Missourians can most effectively influence these decisions.
- **Greater accountability and flexibility in the planning and decision-making process**
MoDOT is accountable to Missourians for making the best use of their transportation dollars. Transportation decisions are made using data about the transportation system and input from those affected. The framework details whom to involve and what

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outcomes are expected; however, it also includes flexibility for local areas to determine how these activities should be done. The framework also includes a system of checks and balances to make certain the process is working.

- **Ensured integrity of Missouri's transportation system**

The framework will make sure limited transportation dollars are spent in the best possible way, helping MoDOT and regional and local agencies meet strategic transportation goals.

The new planning process improves the way MoDOT makes decisions about which transportation problems to address first. The prioritization processes insure consistent evaluation of similar problems around the state. For instance, repairing rough pavement in one part of the state is prioritized using the same information and methods as in another part of the state.

Local communities have more influence in this improved process because local officials now have a guaranteed seat at the decision-making table. This doesn't mean local officials will always get what they want; it means their opinions and issues will be considered. It also means they will understand the situation, and why in some cases, the answer must be no.

MoDOT's planning process is more open than ever before. Even though the overall steps in the planning process haven't really changed, the opportunities for public involvement at the local level have grown. The improved process identifies the points in the process where individual decisions are made and how local officials and citizens can most easily affect these decisions. Involving the right people throughout the process just makes sense and improves the results.